

Stafford County Purchase of Development Rights

APRIL 2014

AGRICULTURE IN STAFFORD COUNTY

As Stafford County continues to grow, farm land in the rural areas of the county is shrinking. According to the 2012 US Department of Agricultural, National Agricultural Statistics Service, there were 215 farms in Stafford County, totaling 15,260 acres, compared to 233 farms totaling 19,816 acres in 2007. The average size of farms decreased from 85 acres to 71 acres. Farms greater than 500 acres in size decreased in number by 50.0%, while farms less than 10 acres in size saw the biggest increase in number, up 37.9%.

Agriculture in the County includes the raising of livestock, such as cattle, hogs, sheep, horses, and chickens; planting and harvesting crops, such as corn, wheat and oats; and timbering. In addition, the County has two winery operations. The market value of products sold in 2012 was \$2,739,000.



Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program

Increased development pressure and higher land values in the County often entice land owners to sell their property. The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program offers an alternative to selling land thereby preserving the rural and open spaces in the County.

A PDR Committee was established by the Board of Supervisors in August 2007 to create a PDR program. PDR is a voluntary program that compensates property owners for restricting development on their land through recordation of a conservation easement. The property owner retains ownership of the land and may continue to reside on

property, and retain such uses as farming or timbering. Compensation to the property owner is determined by how many development rights exist on the property. A development right is equivalent to a buildable lot that can be forged from a tract of land. The PDR Committee establishes the methodology for determining a development right, as well as the monetary contribution

per development right.

The County currently pays \$25,000 per development right. Areas of hydric (wet) soils, and slopes greater than or equal to 25% are subtracted from the overall formula.

In order to qualify for the County's PDR program, the following criteria must be met:

- ◆ Property zoned A-1 or A-2, minimum 20 acres (Contiguous properties can be combined to achieve 20-acre minimum)
- ◆ Property is able to be subdivided
- ◆ Property has capability of supporting agricultural or forestal use



PDR Funding

The Board of Supervisors determines the funding for the PDR program, which can come from a variety of sources. In 2006, the Board authorized use of general fund money for a pilot program. In 2011, the Board authorized a dedicated funding source from rollback tax excess from the Land Use Program. In addition, state matching funds through the

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) have been utilized to leverage the County's funds.

To date, the County has allocated approximately \$825,000 to the PDR program. Matching funds in the amount of \$675,000 have been received from VDACS. A total of \$1,350,000 has been spent

to purchase conservation easements on three properties.



PDR Progress



Total money spent:

\$1,350,000

County: \$675,000

VDACS: \$675,000

Total properties: 3

Total land preserved:

265 acres

Total Development

Rights retired: 52

For information on potential tax benefits, please contact your tax advisor or attorney.

Since 2009, the County has purchased the development rights on three properties, totaling 265 acres. A total of 52 development rights have been retired. A pilot program was held in 2009,

which resulted in the purchase of the County's first conservation easement. A second program round was held in 2013, which resulted in the purchase of the second and third ease-

ments. The County will continue with additional application rounds as funds are available. The following highlights the progress to date.

2007

- ◆ The BOS appointed PDR Committee and PDR Administrator, and adopted Chapter 22A of the County Code establishing new PDR program

2008

- ◆ The BOS allocated funds to the PDR program totaling \$299,242
- ◆ VDACS granted \$299,242 in matching funds

2009

- ◆ Pilot program was initiated, with six applications received
- ◆ The BOS authorized purchase of first PDR conservation easement
- ◆ Land preserved: 98 acres with 22 development rights. Total cost \$600,000

2010

- ◆ BOS merged Agricultural Commission and PDR Committee into one body (Ag/PDR Committee)
- ◆ Ag/PDR Committee evaluated Pilot program and continued work toward next program round

2011

- ◆ BOS authorized use of excess rollback tax money for dedicated PDR funds
- ◆ PDR allocation \$66,093
- ◆ VDACS matching funds \$66,093

2012

- ◆ PDR Committee recommended new application round
- ◆ PDR allocation \$169,500

2012 (cont.)

- ◆ VDACS matching funds \$160,715

2013

- ◆ Second PDR application round held, nine applications received
- ◆ PDR allocation \$290,154
- ◆ VDACS matching funds \$149,678
- ◆ County purchased easements on two properties
- ◆ BOS authorized purchase of third easement subject to funding
- ◆ Land preserved: 167 acres with 30 development rights. Total cost \$750,000

Additional Information

PDR Committee

Jeff Adams, Hartwood District
Martin McClevey, Griffis-Widewater District

John Howe, Falmouth District
Gail Clark, Rock Hill District
Bob Hunt, Aquia District

Craig DeBernard, George Washington District

(Vacant) Garrisonville District

Staff Contacts

Kathy Baker,
Program Administrator
kbaker@staffordcountyva.gov

John Harbin,
Environmental Planner
jharbin@staffordcountyva.gov

Call 540-658-8668 or visit
www.staffordcountyva.gov

